

## Sermon 16, Fleshly Pursuits, 2 Peter 2:13b-16

**Proposition:** False teachers love fleshly pleasure, but the Angel of the Lord will rebuke them in due time.

- I. What False Teachers Love: Pleasure
- II. What False Teachers Are
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### **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we continue this evening to look at Peter's assault on the false teachers. As we saw two weeks ago, the apostle informs us that the Lord will especially punish two sorts of sinners: those who go after flesh in the lust of defilement, and those who despise authority. We saw some characteristics of those who despise authority in last Sunday's sermon; today, we see Peter turn to the other kind of specially wicked sinner, the one who goes after flesh in the lust of defilement. We will see this evening an extended profile of the man who loves pleasure more than God. Essentially, we see the overarching characteristic — that the false teacher is a lover of pleasure — and then how that works itself out. We'll see what the false teachers are, what their idea of a workout routine is, how they love to monetize sin, and, of course, their eventual fate. The bottom line: False teachers love fleshly pleasure, but the Angel of the LORD will rebuke them in due time.

#### **I. What False Teachers Love: Pleasure**

We begin by looking at how the false teachers think. Peter says that they think it's a pleasure to revel in the daytime, with the obvious implication that they love reveling. They think feasting is a lot of fun. Now, the problem here is not that they think feasting is a pleasure. Presumably all of us enjoy a good feast. That's why buffet restaurants were invented.

Rather, the problem is that they do it in the daytime. Instead of working when they should be working, they enjoy playing. They think it's a lot of fun to skip work and pig out and get drunk. Now, one commentator said that these false teachers must be relatively wealthy if they can afford to take the day off and feast during a work time. But Peter doesn't say specifically that they actually revel in the daytime. He says they think it's fun to do so. In other words, it's at least possible that they would do this if they could. As Solomon said, "Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!" (Ecc 10:16 ESV). Perhaps the false teachers actually feasted in the morning; perhaps they only wanted to but didn't have the ability to carry out their perverse desire. Either way, the message is obvious: The false teachers love pleasure, and they love it with an inordinate or disordered love. An ordered love of pleasure takes pleasure in eating and drinking at the right time. A disordered love displaces eating and drinking and other forms of pleasure to where they don't belong.

Think this is no big deal? Well, who in here hasn't looked at Facebook when you should have been working? Who hasn't goofed around on the Internet when you could have been writing a thank-you note? Who hasn't wasted time on something fun when work and your close relationships were calling? Brothers and sisters, we can look at the false teachers and say, "How evil! They carouse in the daytime." But the same principle that led the false teachers to carouse in the daytime leads you and me to enjoy pleasure at times when we should be working or loving others. Don't be so quick to judge the false teachers and mentally distance yourself from them. Instead, try a little repentance. It will be painful to walk away from the pleasures you're used to getting at inappropriate times, but if you don't, you can count on a confrontation with the Angel of the LORD. We'll talk about that in a minute.

## **II. What False Teachers Are**

Well, Peter goes on to tell us more about these false teachers. He highlights six characteristics in a row — and the first of them is a doozy.

### **A. Stains in Christ's spotless bride**

From the beginning of the Levitical system, God wanted a sacrifice without spot and blemish. In the New Testament, we are told both that Christ is a lamb without spot or blemish and that He is conforming His bride to His image so that she too might be without spot or blemish. The church is the spotless bride of Christ — now, in principle, and later on in reality. So far so good. But the presence of false teachers rising up among us is just another way of saying that the spotless bride of Christ has spots and blemishes. False teachers are the pimples of the church! False teachers are the blemishes that Christ doesn't want to see, the blemishes that He is actively removing from His bride. Again, the point is clear: False teachers will be judged. But a false teacher, as I've said many times, is not just T.D. Jakes and Joel Osteen and Joseph Smith and other high-profile liars. Yes, those men are false teachers. But Peter is telling us that everyone whose love for pleasure is inordinate is also a false teacher at some level. That person is a stain, and either he must be purified by the blood of Christ or else he will be removed from the bride. Do

you want to be cut off from God's people? Then go ahead and take pleasure when you should be working.

### **B. Partakers of a Lie Feast rather than a Love Feast**

Well, borrowing from Jude, Peter adds that the false teachers feast with God's people. But rather than feasting in *agapais*, love feasts, as Jude mentions, Peter changes the term to *apatais*, lies. What's the point? Again, it's a rhetorical move, rather along the lines of my father always referring to the news anchor as Dan Blather or the local newspapers as the *Denver Pest* and *The Rocky Mountain Snooze*. The point is that the word sounds similar but implies something completely different. It's a not-so-subtle form of mockery, in other words. The love feasts (which is what the early church called what we potlucks, and which they served alongside the Lord's Supper in those early days) were, for the false teachers, lie feasts. Why? Because they didn't love the people of God! Having departed from Christ and given themselves to sin, how could they? Those who don't love God don't love their neighbors either.

So how about you? At church potlucks can you really say that you love your neighbor? By the way, if you never attend church potlucks, what does that say about how much you love your fellow believers? Again, don't be like the false teachers. Don't pervert the potluck into a lie feast.

### **C. Lustful lookers**

Well, these delightful folks have even more tricks up their sleeves. They are also lustful lookers; literally, they have eyes full of an adulteress. That's what they're always looking for, and at. Again, anyone in here convicted? If you look lustfully, you are at some level like a false teacher. If you are on the hunt for an adulteress, for a woman who's willing to leave her husband and sleep with you, then you are definitely resembling a false teacher. How can you stop being a lustful looker? Repent. Turn away from sin. And ask God for the grace to no longer sin like that. He will help you.

### **D. Ceaseless Sinners**

Well, these false teachers are non-stop sinners. The Greek word is literally "stop" with an alpha-privative in front of it — what we would call "non-stop" in our own language. These folks are ceaseless sinners. They keep after it, long after you would think that it hurt more than it helped to be a sinner like them! Sound familiar? Of course it does! Though by God's grace you and I do have the power to stop sinning, so often we don't stop as long as we'd like. So often we keep sinning even when we have every reason to quit. In other words, these false teachers are our sociological other. They are a danger to us, but in them we see ourselves. May we never walk in the pride that says "I'm not like that." Instead, we need to walk in the humility that says, "Left to myself, I will be just like that."

### **E. Seducers**

The false teachers seduce unstable souls. We saw last week that they naturally have predatory instincts. Just like the hunting lion, they go after the weak, the slow, the sick, the people on the edge of the flock. In one sense, preaching about them on Sunday evening does little good

because by definition the people who come in the evening are at the core of the church. But brothers and sisters, we need, as the core, to continue to reach out to the periphery. We need to continue to pray for those who only come one or two times a month. We need to stand up for the truth and stand against the false teachers' predatory seduction. And that means that we need to seek out the marginal people first. Are people on the edge of this congregation going to go to the Salvation Army for help or come to us for help? Are people on the edge of this congregation going to seek friends at work before they seek them here? If so, we need to redouble our efforts to invite these people over, to have them in our lives, to befriend them and help them be grounded in the truth.

#### **F. Children of a curse**

Well, Peter pauses for breath with this climactic, Biblical-sounding denunciation: The false teachers are "accursed children." In other words, they are under the curse of God. They will not prosper forever; instead, they will wither away and die and go to Hell. We too were by nature children of wrath until God saved us. This description shouldn't make us fear the false teachers, but rather teach us to pity and love them. Christ Himself underwent God's curse for us; how do we respond to the cursed false teachers? More importantly for us in here, how do you turn and find God's blessing? The answer is by repentance. The Christian message is that on this side of the grave, God's curse is not final. Instead, you can turn and find His blessing. I know you have done so. Don't give up. Don't turn away. Out of your blessedness, you can and must offer blessedness to the false teachers, to the people on the margins, and to yourself and your family. Don't live like a false teacher; you are beloved children, not accursed children.

#### **III. What False Teachers Work Out at the Gym: Their Greedy Hearts, v. 14d**

Well, in addition to the six characteristics of the false teacher that we just saw, Peter lists two more. The first of these is an athletic metaphor that's obvious in Greek but hard to render in English. As you may know, the word "gymnasium" is a Greek word, and we use it, as the Greeks did, to refer to a place for physical training. Well, the Greeks had a verb for going to the gym; they called it "gymnizing" (*gymnazo*). And Peter uses that verb here to tell us that the false teachers work out at the gym. But the part they work out is not their body but their heart, and the strength they're training is greed. That's right: They metaphorically go the gym to work out the greedy hearts, doing strength training to make their greed even stronger.

That's messed up. And it's a notable characteristic of the false teacher. They love pleasure, and one of the key components of pleasure is money. They love desiring money so much that they actually go work out their desires so that they can want it more. They move up from wanting the stuff at the dollar store to wanting the stuff at Walmart to wanting the stuff at Saks Fifth Avenue. They want cars, then luxury cars, then supercars. Soon even that's not enough, and they start buying real estate. They shop superyachts. They seek private jets. The greedier the better, in their book.

Can you believe this stuff? Rather than training their heart to love, they train it to be greedy. Rather than training themselves for contentment, they train themselves to devour. It's all

part of the picture. We already saw that their natural instincts are for snaring and killing. They don't live with open hands; they live with open mouths, constantly sucking in more, more, MORE!

And do you know what? Peter isn't being overdramatic. This is literally how the successful false teachers around us operate. They spend their time getting and spending money, and they are not content with what they have.

But again, this sermon is not about Joel Osteen. It's about Jesus, and directed to His people. I know that none of you have a habit of buying supercars and that no one in here is likely to own a superyacht anytime soon. Just for kicks, I did a tiny bit of research — it looks like you can charter a superyacht to take you and your friends on vacation for around \$650,000 per week. That's nothing, right?

But in all seriousness, brothers and sisters, how might you and I train our hearts for greed rather than love? It happens the moment we begin to care about stuff more than we care about people made in God's image. If you care more about keeping mud off your carpet than about your child's soul, you're training your heart in greed. If you care more about how much food the guests are wasting than you do about showing them God's love and enjoying them as people, then you are training your heart in greed. If you refuse to host people in your home because you're worried about what they'll think, about what they'll do to your stuff, about how they might impact your lifestyle and time and energy, then you are training your heart in greed.

Train your heart for love! Train it by spending time with Love Himself. He gave up everything and came to earth, where, as I've said before, He went from working class to homeless over the course of His life. Jesus loved people and gave up riches to show it. And He calls you to imitate Him. True pastors, true teachers, will be like their Master. False teachers will prefer to exploit you.

#### **IV. What False Teachers Love: Monetizing Sin Like Balaam, vv. 15-16**

You see, we saw already that false teachers love pleasure and that that means they love money. What they love most is leaving the path of righteousness to pull a Balaam and seek to monetize sin. If you recall, Balaam was offered a huge sum of money to curse Israel on behalf of King Balak. He refused, but then agreed to try. He valued the money more than he valued listening to the word of God, which told him plainly that he would never be able to curse Israel.

Balaam was the first in a long line of people who want to monetize sin, to make a profit from evil. Whether we look to the people who campaign to legalize marijuana in our own day, or at the people who made homosexual porn legal back in the '40s and '50s, or at the people who sell all kinds of depraved and brutal things, arms dealers, sex toy manufacturers, and the list goes on and on — they all have in common this desire to monetize sin. As Peter put, they love the wages of unrighteousness. They love the money they can make off evil.

Do you? Do you really like the extra income from cheating on your taxes? Do you really enjoy the money you get by running a "massage parlor" on the side? Does the money you save by not showing hospitality or by defrauding your children of your help and support really mean a

lot to you? Brothers and sisters, Balaam was unable to resist the lure of making money by sinning. And you will be too unless you know Christ. If you don't know God, what could be more valuable than money? Beauty fades, but gold does not. Friendships weaken and die, but people will always want money.

You've heard these platitudes. We know they're stupid. But we often tend to believe them. Why? Because our hearts are trained in greed, that's why! We adopt the values of our culture, the richest culture in history and one that openly worships wealth.

Wealth is a wonderful thing. Wealth is a blessing. Wealth is a deceitful thing. Wealth is a curse. Proverbs teaches all these things; indeed, half the references to wealth in Proverbs are positive and half are negative. The point is clear: wealth is a terrible god. It's an awful thing to love and worship. Only God is good all the time. Riches are bad half the time.

Don't love the wages of unrighteousness. Love Jesus, for in Him are the wages of righteousness. He is the reward of the righteous, and if you have Him you have His wealth too. If you're seeking Him, the wealth will be thrown in too. But if you're only seeking the wealth, you'll have nothing in Hell forever.

## **V. What False Teachers Will Experience**

You see, Balaam is the patron saint of false teachers. There are three parts of his story that Peter highlights here.

### **A. Madness**

The first one is madness. Well, okay, that's the last word of the verse. But Peter says that Balaam was out of his mind, suffering from *paraphronia*. Yes, that's the preposition for "beside" and the noun for "mind." He was beside himself. He had lost his mind; he was nuts, insane, crazy. Now, we talked last week about how crazy stupid a disdain for authority will make you. Here we see how literally crazy the unbridled pursuit of pleasure will make you. Balaam was insane. He was mentally ill.

In our day, it is estimated that 18% of Americans have some kind of mental illness. But a far higher percentage than that lives for pleasure. Of course, part of the madness is in what you're leaving behind. As Peter concludes the chapter, those who know better and leave the straight path anyway will definitely suffer. You're here, hearing the word of God. If you walk away, madness is in store for you.

### **B. Obliviousness**

But Balaam, the prototypical false teacher, remained oblivious to his danger. His donkey had to talk to him, because he didn't see the Angel of the LORD. He was spiritually oblivious. This is a characteristic of the false teacher. He may be able to talk well about theology and God and Christ and Heaven and so on, but he's totally oblivious to spiritual realities. He wouldn't know Christ if Jesus manifested Himself in front of him and knocked him off his donkey. That's what happened to Balaam, who had had *no idea* that Christ was opposed to him going with the men in order to gain the money he would get from cursing Israel. How could he have had no idea? A dumb animal saw the Son of God standing there and knew better than to defy Him. Balaam didn't.

How's your spiritual perception? If you've given yourself over to sin, I can tell you this: It's dead. You are as oblivious as Balaam himself. If Christ came to meet you, you wouldn't even know it. The thing about being oblivious is that you don't know you're oblivious. You think you are well aware of the relevant factors in the situation. Spiritual realities are, to you, an "unknown unknown." You have no idea, and you are shocked, *shocked*, when the Angel of the LORD turns out to be right in front of you with a drawn sword in His hand. God might be shouting at you "Turn around! Go back!" and you just plunge on ahead because you're ignorant of what's happening.

### **C. A Confrontation with the Angel of the LORD**

Ultimately, brothers and sisters, what false teachers are destined for is the same thing Balaam found: a bruising confrontation with the Angel of the LORD. They will meet their Maker, and, without a donkey's intervention on their behalf, He will use the sword in His hand to kill them. He would have killed Balaam except that the donkey had enough spiritual perception to warn her master. Contemporary false teachers won't be so lucky. With the sword, not of His hand but of His mouth, our Lord Jesus will condemn false teachers to Hell.

Is a meeting with Jesus good news or bad news for you? Do you live like a false teacher, or when you commit the lustful sins these evil people commit, do you sincerely turn in repentance and faith? Brothers and sisters, a confrontation with the Son of God as the judge of all the world is coming for all of us. I urge you be ready for it. Get to know Jesus. Love Him. Obey Him. Turn from your sins and seek His forgiveness. He died so that you could live. Don't forsake Him. Don't be a false teacher. Love and teach the truth because you love Jesus. He will save you, even from yourself. Amen.